DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 074 RC 023 070

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TITLE From the Bush to the City: Reversing an Australian Trend in Teacher Professional Development.
PUB DATE 2000-05-00
NOTE 11p.; In: Issues Affecting Rural Communities (II). Proceedings of the International Conference [on] Rural Communities & Identities in the Global Millennium (Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, May 1-5, 2000); see RC 023 040.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Cooperation; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; Models; *Partnerships in Education; *Politics of Education; Professional Isolation; Program Descriptions; Program Design; *Rural Education; *Teacher Alienation
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Victoria)

ABSTRACT

Australian society in the 1990s has been marked by the gradual disenfranchisement of rural communities due to the urban bias of political and economic decision-makers. In Victoria, curriculum changes based on strategic centralism, consumer capture, and educational accountability were accompanied by a more controlled, urban-biased approach to professional development that alienated many rural teachers. In South Gippsland (Victoria), a professional development working group developed "Gourmet PD," a professional development program controlled by rural teachers. Gourmet PD has been a startling success because it was developed by rural planners to meet rural needs; it remained responsive to changing rural needs; it was ignored by urban education planners until it had become so established that metropolitan interference was not an option; it emphasized continuing client and customer consultation; it hired a local teacher to be program manager; the local department of education supported the program; the Monash University, the local department of education, and two Gippsland centers for adult and community education remained partners, not owners, of the program; and it provided high-quality professional development at half the cost of other equivalent programs. As of January 1999, over 7,000 teachers were engaged in Gourmet PD activities and it has become the preferred model for professional development in both rural and urban settings. (Contains 18 references.) (TD)

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# From The Bush To The City: Reversing An Australian Trend In Teacher Professional Development

*Tony Taylor, Australia*

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# From The Bush To The City: Reversing An Australian Trend In Teacher Professional Development

*Tony Taylor, Australia*

**Background**

1995 saw the start of a professional development program for rural Victorian teachers for which planning had begun in the previous year. The planners were a small group of educators who had first rendezvoused in August 1994 in the South Gippsland town of Leongatha. Here, they chose to call their program "Gourmet PD" - a name which symbolised their commitment to a high quality PD program for local teachers.

In its first year of operations Gourmet PD attracted 240 South Gippsland teachers (almost 50% of the district total) to its courses. These courses were organised by a partnership which comprised teachers, the state education ministry (the Directorate of School Education), the local Adult and Community Education Centre and Monash University's Faculty of Education. In its second year, there was rapid growth with 900 participants in three Gippsland education districts. In its third year (1997) growth continued, with over 2 100 teachers in some 250 (mainly state) schools participating in the Gourmet PD partnership across five education district (the entire Gippsland region). The 1999 participation rate was estimated at 4 100 across two regions and operating in seven education districts. At the time of writing (January 2000) it is anticipated that over 7 000 teachers will participate in the Year 2000's Gourmet PD (and offshoot) programs.

The surprising success of Gippsland Gourmet PD can be attributed to a variety of factors not least of these is the determination of that 1994 Leongatha Planning Group to provide rural solutions for rural problems - in the face of rural decline.

**Rural decline and professional development for teachers**

One of the most remarked upon features of Australian society in the 1990s has been the

gradual disenfranchisement of rural and regional communities, a circumstance which has, in part, produced a disaffected electorate and led to the growth of radical right-wing political groups such as Pauline Hanson's One Nation.

This disempowerment began, it could be argued, as a consequence of the urban bias of political and economic decision-makers (e.g. Lynn, 1989 and as commented on in Sher and Sher, 1994). Indeed, there is a view that, because of this kind of demographic/political relationship, rural voices are stifled by political/social, cultural, commercial and educational aspects of urban-rural relations.

Political/social relations and urban bias

Since urban voters make up a huge majority of electors, whichever political party is in power, Victorian state governments have tended to pander to their urban constituents at the expense of country regions. This has been noticeably true of the recent conservative coalition (1992-1999). For example, Victoria's Liberal/National State Premier Jeff Kennett initiated what was satirically called "a Casino-led recovery' which saw a special emphasis on a the opening of a major gambling venue (The Australian 9/5/1997), as well as the staging of major sporting events and the opening of major transport links in Melbourne. In this context, it is worthy of note that at that time, the only two independent state parliamentarians (199-99) were both from bush constituencies, one of whom, Susan Davies, was based in South Gippsland.

**Cultural problems**

Because rural infrastructure in Victoria is delicately balanced and poorly resourced, as it is in many states, there are major problems maintaining viable rural facilities. Schools, hospitals and social service offices are thinly scattered and are often given a low priority in governmental budget programs. Moreover, it is often difficult to attract professionals, especially teachers, to rural areas where there is an under-developed middle class culture. In this context, rural teachers say that "intellectual isolation is their most pressing professional concern" (Boylan, 1991).

**Commercial culture and the collapse of infrastructure**

Many commercial enterprises are completely closing down or are scaling down their rural offices because of alleged poor financial returns. This exodus from the bush reduces employment opportunities, results in a financial drain from the community, produces loss of community confidence and exacerbates the problem of declining infrastructure (Beal and Ralston, 1997). At the same time, the scaling down of local councils and the introduction of compulsory tendering has reduced the size of the local government workforce, reduced rural income and expenditure and, it is

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argued, severely reduced the level of service (Tesdorpf, 1996).

**The educational issues**

Although, more recently {1997}, the Victorian state ministry of education moved to plush offices at the expensively renovated Old Treasury Building, this Melbourne-based bureaucracy, operated throughout most of the 1990s from a landmark skyscraper office in central Melbourne known as the Rialto. To many teachers, this skyscraper became a symbol of an out-of-touch ministry apparently obsessed with applying economic rationalist (neo-liberal in North America) ideas in order to acquire what the government of the day considered to be sound economic and educational fundamentals. "The Rialto" soon became a emblematic phrase which represented insensitive, centralised administration which brooked no argument and which was characterised by crisis management, so much so that the School News, a ministry publication, became known in many staffrooms as "Pravda".

In contrast to urban luxury, the management of rural education is carried out via a series of small and understaffed offices in regional areas, a symbolic representation, it could be argued, of a department which has been accused of being intensely "urbo-centric" (Collingridge's phrase, 1990) in large and small matters. A typical, small scale example was the prevailing 1990s fashion for city-based breakfast policy and curriculum meetings which were customarily held in hotels in Melbourne and which commence at 8.00-8.30 am. These occasions had no meaning for bush teachers who may have lived and worked from 200 - 500 kilometres from that hotel, who were unable to attend and who were unable to participate: yet another example of the silencing of the rural voice.

It comes as no surprise therefore to find that professional development for rural teachers was sporadic, haphazard and often variable in quality, even before the Kennett 1992-99 government. This erratic approach to PD put Victorian rural teachers under great strain at a time when the pace of curriculum change in Victoria has been unremitting and frantic (Gough and Taylor, 1996).

To help deal with constant curriculum change, the new ministry (1992-97), adopted a policy based on strategic centralism (Townsend, 1996), consumer capture and educational accountability, moving towards a more controlled approach to PD and a much closer linking of PD activities to major state government curriculum initiatives. This approach was meant to replace much of the irregular PD which had taken place during the 1980s, and which had been, for many Victorian teachers, an activity of choice virtually fully-funded by the former Ministry of Education.

Consequently, the allegedly ideological nature of that curriculum change alienated many teachers from the Victorian PD process, which they tended to see as part of a political campaign waged by what was considered to be an unashamedly politicised state ministry. The Kennett government having refused to deal with teacher unions at all, abolished 8,000 teaching positions and closed over 200 schools, many of them small rural schools which had once been the focus of many country settlements. Education policy in Victoria during the early-mid 90s seemed to be constant turmoil (Gough and Taylor, 1996), producing accusations of endemic crisis (The Age 4/11/1996) caused, it was suggested, by this continuous destabilisation of the curriculum. There occurred an alleged rise in stress and loss of morale amongst principals and teachers which seemed to be unprecedented and yet, at heart, which seemed to be ignored or denied by a ministry intent on self-justification (The Sunday Age 22/6/1997).

**The federal educational background: the bush misses out again**

The political changes wrought by the Kennett government took place in a wider climate of educational change instigated by the Federal (Labor) governments of Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Treasurer (later Prime Minister) Paul Keating. As part of the move to support a late 1980s attempt at a national curriculum at state and territory level, during the 1993-1995 triennium, the Federal Labor Government allocated $60 million for teacher professional development in the National Professional Development Program (NPDP). NPDP was supposed to provide resources over and above what the various states and territories were prepared to spend on local PD (National Professional Development Program Mid-term review of NPDP projects, 1995).

In an annual competition, the Canberra-based NPDP program organisers accepted bids from local state-based PD providers and the money was disbursed at state and territory level. Victoria had generally done quite well out of this program, gathering in about $4 million per annum, but there were two problems with NPDP.

In the first place, the Federal government accused state governments of propping up their state infrastructure with some of the NPDP money instead of using all of it to finance new projects. A second problem was that, in Victoria, most of the money went to state-level PD consortia which already had strong state government connections. For example, the Victorian (school) subject associations, which were partly financed by the state ministry and whose umbrella organisation was housed in a ministry building in Richmond, Melbourne, were major beneficiaries of NPDP grants. Indeed, a state ministry representative chaired the state NPDP selection meetings and only major PD providers who submitted a "state-wide" programs were accepted. This meant that regional areas

such as Gippsland had to depend on metropolitan-based consortia who, whilst often espousing "state-wide" provision, in reality stayed in the metropolitan area and did little for rural and remote districts.

For example, the Mathematics Association of Victoria (MAV), normally an active and progressive organisation, was successful with its "Maths in Schools" project in 1994 but a year later, only two Gippsland schools (out of over two hundred and fifty) had benefited from this particular project.

**Geography**

To compound the problem of metropolitan bias, the Gippsland region had no major urban focus which would allow the area to develop its own concentrated PD activities. In contrast, most other Victorian regions have a major centre (e.g. Ballarat/Bendigo/Geelong/Warrnambool) but Gippsland, for historical reasons, had developed a string of small towns along the route of the Princes Highway (Warragul/Moe/Morwell/Traralgon/Sale/Bairnsdale) but none of these towns is significant enough to act as a major focus for any form of regional activity. This means that most Gippsland teachers who were keen to keep up with the latest issues in education, would only have the Melbourne option for any major professional development activity.

Thus, in a political climate where attitudes to the ministry were polarised amongst teaching staff and where educational change was regarded by many as a series of stress-inducing, politicised fads (The Age 22/11/1997). Government sponsored PD was quickly seen as, at worst, an attempt at indoctrination (The Sunday Age 15/6/1997) and, at best, a city-centred cosmetic exercise.

In this climate of distrust, whilst many rural teachers might indeed be alienated from the Rialto, they were however prepared to turn instead to their local education leaders as an alternative PD management system and they could also turn to their local university as a disinterested commentator and resource provider. That is how Gourmet PD began.

**The starting point: South Gippsland**

South Gippsland, is a small, picturesque district which serves a remote (by metropolitan standards) rural community of dairy farmers, arable farmers, some small farming enterprises (e.g. plant and tree nurseries and, for example, a lavender farm), viticulture and tourism (Wilson's Promontory and Philip Island). Leongatha, the small administrative and demographic capital of the district is a good two hours drive from central Melbourne. Local teachers, over-stressed by the pace of top-down curriculum change 1992-94 which had no apparent rural context, wanted local, not metropolitan, provision and they made this quite clear through the voices of their PD Coordinators at the August planning meeting referred to in the introduction. Teachers explained that they were tired after a day's teaching and an exhausting journey into town to attend a frequently enervating PD workshop was costly in time, in energy, in petrol and, most importantly perhaps, costly to family harmony. Moreover, they wanted PD which addressed rural issues and which was not based upon metropolitan assumptions about resources and access to further PD provision.

Previously, South Gippsland teachers had been prepared to pay good money for local PD provision but it was often too difficult and too expensive to obtain. It was true that, on the travelling circuit, there were PD gurus who would travel from Melbourne to rural areas, but this was often only at a price (sometimes as much a $2,000 plus travel costs of $80 per hour for a one-off workshop). Moreover PD gurus would, as a rule, come (1) only if the participant numbers were there, (2) only when it suited the gurus and (3) only if each guru could perform his or her fixed routine. This "missionary attitude" to PD, allowed highly paid outsiders to drive in, accept large sums of money, perform their routine and drive off again, leaving behind a group of by now impoverished but highly excited teachers with nowhere to go except back to their individual schools and back to the same old routines. This was not what the teachers of South Gippsland wanted.

**The solution: grassroots decisions**

The South Gippsland PD Working Party (of three) met several times in late 1994 to discuss the problem. What was needed, it was decided, was a program which placed control of rural PD in the hands of rural teachers. For too long, it was felt, teachers in the bush had been forced to accept metropolitan solutions to rural problems.

The course design, therefore, was based on several key points:

- *Teacher Demand* Each course or set of courses started with local teacher demand not with ministry priorities and not with PD guru availability. Accordingly, all teachers in the district were surveyed and their responses fed into calculations about what might be offered. This was a participation and empowerment issue.
- *Local Provision* Each course is offered locally. To allow maximum participation and maximum attendance, courses were offered within the locality at suitably comfortable venues (not schools initially - for political reasons - too close to a seemingly heavily politicised ministry). They were also offered at an appropriate time (usually shortly after school or early evening - not the weekends which are regarded as a sacrosanct recreational break in Australia) and with substantial refreshments provided. This was more than just a convenience issue, it was also a status issue.

Local PD would need to operate in a comfortable and welcoming environment.

- *High Quality* For too long, it had been asserted by many non-metropolitan observers, rural teachers had been fobbed off with second best. In the South Gippsland program, the organisers paid for the very best PD providers that money could buy. To make their intentions plain, the term "Gourmet PD" was adopted (Gippsland is on of Australia's major cheese, fruit and wine producing areas and is often referred to as a "Gourmet Region"). Although initially regarded as a peculiar, and even eccentric, choice of name, the Gourmet tag was a political statement which soon became not only accepted but also sought-after by PD providers who saw selection for Gourmet PD as a status symbol.
- *School-based research* An important component of the process is the carrying back into schools. ideas and activities generated by the PD workshops. Here, teachers are encouraged to adopt an action research approach and actually try out some of the initiatives to which they had recently been introduced.
- *University credit* Many teachers had successfully completed PD programs which had been intensive and onerous but they often found themselves repeating the same kind of work when they enrolled in postgraduate studies at a university faculty of education. A major aim of the Gourmet PD was to introduce a system which would allow all participants the opportunity to gain credit for PD studies. This was a recognition of the value of practitioner-research and an attempt to build teacher self-confidence in reflective practice.

To carry out these aims, early in 1995, the planning team arranged for the hire of a Gourmet PD Manager, a local high school teacher (Terry Harrington) who brought to the project outstanding qualities which included strong commitment, remarkable professional knowledge and a readiness to listen and learn. The program was to be funded, in the first instance, partly by local DoE funds and partly by a Rialto DoE grant. Later (1996-98), partner schools were to be asked to contribute 25% of the PD budgets towards the program.

**Program design**

The program design, as originally conceived, comprised a 3-stage process. The guidelines were as follows:

- *Stage One: The workshop* The sequence of activities involved full participation commences with a workshop or series of workshops ( a minimum 14 hours contact time later reduced to 12 hours). Workshop leaders were asked to outline recommend follow-up activities and references for subsequent Stages. A list of participants (professional names, addresses and phone numbers only) who wish to progress through Stages One-Three was circulated to relevant participants who registered for Stages One-Three. The names of those who want to go on were given to a Stage Two Coordinator who was usually a local curriculum consultant.
- *Stage Two: dissemination and practitioner research* Participants returned to their school community and arranged for dissemination of ideas and activities discussed and outlined in Stage One workshops. Dissemination could be arranged through the following agencies and activities: Staff forum/ staff meetings/departmental or subject meetings/ subject teaching association meetings/school council meetings/parent evenings/ local radio and local television appearances/local newspaper article(s)/professional magazine or journal article(s). Research/ school-based activities stems from issues raised in Stage One and results may be disseminated via agencies and activities outlined above. Final results of research/classroom activities can be written up for the optional Stage Three (see below). Dissemination/research/school activities were to be documented by participants and validated by a senior member of staff on a university supplied pro forma and submitted at Stage Three. Notional time was set at approximately 12-14 hours of Stage One group activities plus approximately 90-100 hours of study and other activity time including practitioner research. These times/activities were to be approached in a flexible and professional manner. As long as participants demonstrated a *bona fide* professional manner in carrying out these activities, there was normally no problem with university assessment. Stage Two involved the establishment of voluntary, focussed study groups. Each group was normally formed from workshop members who have decided to register for credit. Groups could be single school groups whilst others may spread across a number of schools. Inter-school groups were encouraged. Groups selected a Convenor and a Recorder and notified the District Stage Two Coordinator of their existence. The Convenor then arranged for a series of sessions where specific issues were discussed. Participants and topics were noted by the Recorder and submitted at Stage Three on a university pro forma.
- *Stage Three: university credit and project submission* The final stage involved the submission of a major project. The subject of the project and the proposed methodology were to be outlined on one sheet of A4 paper (with participant contact details) and sent, for initial comment, to the Professional Development Institute (PDI) Monash prior to commencement of the report/project. Maximum word length of the proposed project was 3000 words. If the word length was substantially below this maximum (2000 words or less) participants needed to provide evidence of equivalent substitute written/oral tasks which would be offered in place of the extra 1000 (or so) words. To meet teacher needs, variations on the project format have been

introduced more recently. These include a reflective practice journal. If the final project constituted a substantial departure from a formal written paper (eg a school production or a substantial school charter contribution) this should be fully documented in the original proposal. Projects were examined by PDI Monash staff on a pass/fail/resubmit basis.

If a participants are successful in all three stages they were (in the main) awarded non-specified credit for one 6 point subject at postgraduate level (the equivalent of one-eighth of a year's fulltime work). Some minor variations have been introduced recently to make the system more flexible. It is important to note that credit for professional development courses could only be granted up to five years after completion of each program. Successful participants were awarded a Faculty Professional Certificate. These Certificates may then be submitted in an application for credit to other Monash and non-Monash courses. Attendance requirements at workshop and at Stage Two sessions were 75% minimum. Any problems in this area were to be fully documented with medical certificates.

**The partnership model**

Gourmet PD was based on partnership. The four equal partners in the process were:

- *The Ministry (The Directorate of School Education)* The Ministry, via the Rialto and the regional office, provided policy support, funding, access to schools, the time and services of several key players in the organisation of Gourmet PD, principally Ian Todd (a District Liaison Principal and inspirational local leader) and the Project Manager Terry Harrington plus the fractional services of curriculum consultants to assist with planning and organisation. In 1994-5, Gourmet PD was seen by the Rialto as a small rural project (one of three small PD projects - the two others were urban) of no particular significance. Accordingly, despite putting in $120,000 in cash and probably half as much again in kind over a three year period, between 1994 and 1996 inclusive, only three visits were made to attend management meetings and to check on progress in faraway Gippsland by Rialto staff who were already heavily distracted by state-wide curriculum reform implementation. In the end, this arrangement worked to Gourmet PD's advantage, allowing the program to grow until it reached a stage in its development where, by necessity, its success led to automatic support from the Rialto.
- *The Community Education Centre ( the South Gippsland Adult and Community Education Centre or SGACE).* SGACE, normally funded by federal project money, had acquired substantial expertise in running a variety of adult education programs, in organising venues and speakers as well as in financing these kinds of adult education programs. Gourmet PD was a bonus for SGACE because, at a time when adult education centres were under threat from federal cuts, the Gourmet project would go down on the books as a major activity and a small source of income for SGACE. Moreover, Ned Dennis, the SGACE manager, had very strong educational principles and expertise which, in a constructive and positive fashion, informed management committee meetings during planning and implementation.
- *The Community* South Gippsland is unlike other Gippsland districts in many ways. It has a relaxed ethos which was progressive, comfortable and highly appealing to the many urban refugees who settled in the area during the 1970s and 1980s. Its schools too have always had a particular atmosphere which combined informality with academic and social success. This culture stemmed from the democratic nature of local education organisations, the most significant of which was the South Gippsland District Education Committee (SGDEC), an active and highly consultative group of school officials and local community members. It was the SGDEC who sponsored that first Leongatha PD meeting, provided initial funding and gave continuing support to Gourmet PD. Local teachers and principals were also fully involved in the process of setting up Gourmet PD. Because of this process of careful and genuine consultation, felt that ownership of Gourmet PD resided in South Gippsland.
- *Monash University Faculty of Education* Because Gourmet PD was about teacher-initiated PD, it was important that the university was seen as a partner not as an owner or leader - this despite several queries from the Rialto about why Monash was not a more dominant force within the program. The author's contribution was based on his experience as a course designer - with a background in both school and adult education, as a professional development coordinator and as the Australian Credit Transfer Authority national specialist in credit transfer and recognition of prior learning in primary and secondary education (Taylor,1996 and Taylor & Clemans 2000). As the faculty representative, the author attended committee meetings, helped design the Three Stage strategy, devised credit transfer strategies and acted as a liaison with the world of the university, a society which, to many teachers, is a mysterious, closed and secretive environment. However, it was important that the Monash Faculty did not push forward its own staff as PD providers since there was some scepticism about the capability of long-serving university lecturers in a world of constantly changing curriculum initiatives. Gourmet PD would choose its PD providers from any university or from any non-university consultancy or organisation.

**Program implementation**

The Leongatha Working Party's view was that an organising or steering committee be established which would guide and manage the process of creating the Gourmet PD programs in 1995. The initial Steering Committee consisted of the newly appointed Program Manager Terry Harrington, Ned Dennis of SGACE, Lisa Alexander a Curriculum Consultant, Ian Todd the South Gippsland District Liaison Principal and the author as a Monash University representative. During the second half of 1994 (North American and European readers should be aware that the Australian school 4-term year runs from late January to late December), the Program Manager collated the survey of teacher PD needs. With the assistance of the Steering Committee, he then publicised the program, arranged for workshop leaders to be booked, organised venues and dates and produced the Gourmet PD booklet which was distributed to every teacher in the District.
In Term 2 1995 (April). Gourmet PD began.

**Evaluative report findings and commentary on developments 1995-97**

The first evaluation, of the pioneering South Gippsland scheme, was conducted by Heather Kelly of the Monash Centre for Research in Health, Education and Social Science (CHESS) in late 1995 (Kelly, 1995). The strengths of the program, as identified by the evaluation, included:

- the collaborative, consultative and comprehensive nature of the organising committee which was composed of representatives of various educational sectors who worked harmoniously to ensure that the program remained focussed at the grassroots level.
- the workshops and study groups which were flexible and dynamic in content and delivery and which met teacher needs by addressing current curriculum initiatives in a way that was seen by teachers to be professionally and personally valuable
- the early identification of a need for ongoing professional development which had led to the employment of a dedicated program manager

Points for further development, which could be seen as potential weaknesses, included recommendations that:

- a more intensive marketing strategy be employed to ensure the economic sustainability of the program
- the organising committee be realistic about the strengths and pitfalls of geographical expansion of the program

The evaluation findings indicated that teacher involvement in Gourmet PD was unusually high. In an education district with approximately 500 staff, 43% of all (not just DoE) South Gippsland teachers attended Gourmet PD activities, an unheard of proportion for voluntary PD anywhere in Victoria. 25 study groups were formed but only a small number of teachers (8) proceeded to stage 3. CHESS also reported that 82% of respondents said that their curriculum knowledge had been consolidated or improved. At the same time, 73% said that had become more confident in using the new ministerial curriculum documents (syllabuses and curriculum support materials) and 80% of all participants said that they would enrol in Gourmet PD in the following year, if it were offered. A final comment from one participant was that "other (Education) Districts should sit up and take notice".

And indeed, the other districts did. In 1996, West Gippsland, encouraged by the success of Leongatha-based programs, joined South Gippsland in joint management (by Steering Committee) of a bigger Gourmet program. Halfway through the first semester, East Gippsland too, borrowing from South Gippsland's 1995 experiences, set up its own Gourmet program with its own Steering Committee.

The funding for the 1996 programs had been aided by two new developments. In the first place, the ministry, gratified by the return on its investment in the first Gourmet program, promised a further $40,000 seeding money for West and South Gippsland (East Gippsland, as latecomers, had to operate temporarily on a modified user-pays basis). The second development, which aided all districts eventually, was the ministry decision to relinquish central control of school PD funds and allocate $240 per capita (now approximately $270) to each school for PD activities. The spending of this sum was to be decided at the school level and not by the Rialto. This placed a great deal of PD power in the hands of local Principals and PD Coordinators but the Gourmet Management Team had, from the first, operated a strategy which involved developing good public relations with all school principals whilst, simultaneously, fostering good operational links with PD Coordinators. This groundwork was to bear fruit in 1996 when all participating schools dedicated 25% of their total PD budget to the new Gourmet PD program.

The 1996 program saw partner schools in West, South and East Gippsland auspice 48 courses with 1005 participants. Although no external evaluation was conducted, internal surveys revealed that, in 1996, there was a similar satisfaction rate to the 1995 returns.

Gourmet goes regional and beyond in 1997

Almost inevitably, the other two Gippsland regions (Latrobe Valley and Central Gippsland) fell in step for the 1997 program, What had started out as a small-scale pilot program in 1994 now was spread across the entire region, with a fulltime Regional Manager and a Regional Management Committee aided by District Steering Committees. The budget for the 1997 program was close to $350,000 (including a further seeding grant of $40 000 from the by now flabbergasted ministry) and for 1998. The 1997 program saw 95 courses involving 2123

participants. At the same time, a pilot Gourmet program opened in an adjoining semi-metropolitan region of the Mornington Peninsula with over 1000 potential participants and a budget of $100 000. The Peninsula program, which began in 1998, was currently operating in 1999 with 1500 participants in two education districts (August 1999).

**Modifications 1997-99**

As the program grew in scale and as the planners grew in experience, it became quite clear that the focus for progressive professional development should shift much more to Stage 2 which was now regarded as the engine room of curriculum support and of successful curriculum change.

But whilst it was simple enough (all things being equal) to provide the best workshop leaders, it was less easy to support and monitor Stage 2. In 1995 there had been about 20 South Gippsland Study Groups (out of 240 participants) and these Groups had looked after a variety of projects from school charter development to primary-secondary school transition program development to counselling and welfare research. In 1996 however, the Study Groups were gradually phased out as it became clear that some participants viewed them as semi-compulsory and something of an unwanted commitment. The Study Groups were gradually replaced by District-based Facilitators who acted a links with the university and who would establish Study Groups - if and when required.

If the known level of activity at Stage 2 was relatively strong, the level of activity at Stage 3, even allowing for the relatively minor role of university credit transfer in the process, was disappointing. In 1995 about 6-7 % of all participants went on to Stage 3 and, as the program has grown, this percentage has probably (based on preliminary observations - see below) declined to about 3%.

In an attempt to be more flexible in meeting teacher needs, Monash introduced (in 1997) three forms of assessment for credit. Currently they are:
Option 1 - a short piece of assessment of about 1500 words which reflects on a Stage 2 activity and places it in a broader theoretical context - 4 points credit
Option 2 - a Reflective Practice Journal of not more than 5000 words with an additional 1500 word summative essay - 6 points credit
Option 3 - the original 3000 word essay - 6 points credit
Each of these options should be preceded by a project proposal (maximum 500 words) which is evaluated by a Monash staff member and returned either as accepted or for additional work. The proposal wordlength is then included in the total wordlength.

**Second Evaluative study of Gippsland Gourmet PD (1998)**

Monash's Faculty of Education supported an evaluative survey of Gourmet PD in the Gippsland region (it is also operating in the Peninsula {Frankston} region in 1998). The Chief Investigator was the author. Co-researcher and statistical specialist was Ms Arda Cunningham.

Approximately 1500 survey forms were distributed to Gourmet participants in the autumn of 1998. Surveys were to be completed only by those who participated 1995-97 and each respondent was asked to complete only one questionnaire. What this means is that whilst large numbers of forms were sent out to catch as many respondents as possible, a much Eventually, 377 forms were returned to be examined for this report. The survey used a 5 point Likert scale with 2.5 representing a median response and anything above that represented an increasingly positive response. Of the sample, 227 were primary teachers and 139 were secondary teachers. 11 were a kindergarten teachers or special education teachers. The ratio of female: male respondents was 3:1. The majority (68%) of all respondents had 4 year pre-service qualifications with 1 at 2 years, 4 at 3 years, 5 at 5 years (e.g Post Graduate Diploma) and 3 with Masters coursework degrees. The median age of the sample was 42.14 - slightly younger than the median age of all Victorian teachers (which - in 1998 - was 46). Notably, only 14% of the sample were in their 20s, a reflection of the decline in teacher recruitment in Victoria in the 1990s.

There was no indication that enthusiasm for Gourmet PD was related to age or career-stage. For example, one of the youngest in the sample (21-25) had completed 5 Gourmet workshops in 2 years and one of the oldest (56-60) had completed 10! Most respondents were reluctant to use Gourmet credit to assist in undertaking further study for the following reasons:

- they were too busy at school "Time is very valuable. I would need to study by Distance Ed." Female-secondary age 41/45- 4 year trained - 3 Gourmets)
- they were worried about the cost of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) especially mature age teachers (e.g "I can't afford this (HECS) for both my children and my self (sic) so they come first!!" Female - secondary - age 36/40 - 4 year trained - 4 Gourmets)
- whilst the credit transfer takeup rate was very low, there was no overall view that university courses were irrelevant to professional or personal needs but there was strong evidence that teachers considered university postgraduate qualifications irrelevant to DoE career pathways (e.g. "What point would there be to having yet another degree. They certainly won't pay me more" Female - primary- age 41/45 - 4 year trained - 5 Gourmets)
- whilst there was no majority opinion that university study was professionally irrelevant, faculties of education received mixed reviews. The single focus

of most criticism was faculty staff lack of awareness of current educational issues (e.g. "(we need) Academic staff who (are) currently teaching (in schools) or just left, not people who haven't taught for 20 years". Female - secondary - age 20/25 - 4 year trained - 2 Gourmets).

73 respondents had not yet completed any Stage One workshops and hence were excluded from the analysis. The remaining respondents completed a total of 960 Stage One workshops. 47% completed one or two workshops, 48% from three to seven workshops, and the remaining 5% completed in excess of seven workshops.

**The impact of Gourmet PD**

This project set out to examine the impact of Gourmet PD in the three specific topics:

- teacher effectiveness
- student learning
- attitudes to further (university) study

For the purpose of this article, only the results concerning the first two topics will be discussed. The findings (Likert scale 1–5) were:

*(1) Teacher Effectivenss* A very positive response was noted with improvement in curriculum knowledge and skills at 3. 25 and improved ability to deal with the demands of the profession at 3.42. Most responses to questions regarding classroom effectiveness, organisational skills, counselling skills and understanding of educational systems and structures fell within similar ranges of satisfaction (3.3 to 3.55). Teachers felt more able to deal with curriculum innovation, they were more confident about coping with the stresses and strains of teaching and were more able to deal confidently with parents.

*(2) Improvement in Student Learning* The results indicated an overall positive response to the question "I have observed that Gourmet PD has significantly improved student learning in my classes" with responses. There was a significant increase in positive responses from those who had completed 2 or more workshops (from 2.84 to 3.66). Primary school teachers felt more positive about their experiences in this context than did secondary school teachers.

In the area of improving their skills and knowledge, the three specific areas teachers felt were most impacted by Gourmet PD were teaching and communication skills, cooperation with other teachers, and counselling skills. Respondents also reported that Gourmet PD assisted in them meet the demands of teaching mostly through enabling them to collaborate more effectively with colleagues and deal more effectively with the school management team. They also reported that Gourmet PD programs allowed them to be more confident in dealing with the stresses and strains of teaching. Furthermore, student learning was improved by Gourmet PD through the development of more effective learning practices and a positive attitude to learning, and through the enhancement of subject skills and knowledge.

Overall, teachers who had completed the greater number of workshops expressed significantly more confidence about improvements in student learning than did those who had attended 2 or fewer workshops.

It might be expected that teachers who attended more than two workshops would agree more strongly that Gourmet PD had led to improvement in their skills and knowledge. Gourmet PD might also be expected to help them meet the demands of the profession and improve student learning in their classes - if we assume that these teachers were a self-selecting group. On the other hand the large numbers of teachers attending more than two workshops suggests that the positive effects of Gourmet PD extended beyond any small group of dedicated and committed professionals to the much larger body of teachers who, nearing the end of their careers and (arguably) demoralised by rapid educational change in the 1990s, used Gourmet PD as a collegially stabilising influence on classroom practice.

**Conclusion**

Gourmet PD has been a startling success, particularly at time of rural recession (se for example The Age 20th August 1999). Indeed, the achievements of the program belie the nature of the deficit model of rural education. Whilst some rural school programs may struggle at times of economic need, other rural school programs can succeed if they identify, adopt and take advantage of their very rurality- as has Gourmet PD (see for example Capper, 1993). Rural society, with its informal networks, its pragmatic nature and its capacity for flexibility has proved an ideal nursery for a professional development program which quite easily translates into a more impersonal urban setting.

Gourmet PD's success is almost entirely a consequence of the following factors which have strong rural elements:

- the program was developed by rural planners specifically to meet rural needs
- the program established core operating principles, one of which was to remain flexible in the face of changing rural needs by continually questioning its policies and procedures
- because it was a rural initiative, the program was virtually ignored by urban education planners until it had become so established that metropolitan involvement (or, as some critics would say, interference) was no longer an option
- the program emphasised continuing client and customer consultation
- Gourmet PD hired a creative and energetic Program Manager (Terry Harrington) who is a local teacher with

high levels of local credibility and highly developed listening and organisational skills
- the local, regional DoE office gave strong support to the program
- Monash University Faculty of Education's rural campus remained, together with the DoE and the two Gippsland Centres for Adult and Community Education, a partner in, not the owner of, the program
- Gourmet PD is a self-managed program which provides high-quality PD at roughly half the cost of other equivalent PD programs

What started in Leongatha on a cold and rainy August evening in 1994 has now become the crown in the jewel of Victorian teacher professional development and is currently a preferred model for PD in both rural and in urban settings, a clear example of the power of the voices from the bush.

Postscript

On Friday 6th August 1999, five years after the initial meeting which set up Gourmet PD, the Program Manager Terry Harrington convened a meeting of the Gourmet "Clans" at Leongatha to ascertain future directions for the program. This at a time when the topdown (and far from successful) Victorian Professional Development Network launched by the DoE in 1998 had been based very loosely on Gourmet model and when the DoE had set up a copycat (also topdown)local PD group in eastern Melbourne named "Premium PD". Moreover, Gourmet groups are springing up in the nearby Dandenong region and in the northern Victorian Goulburn region.

The Clans concluded that Gourmet PD should proceed as a grassroots model - but one that needed to take into account school-based PD needs as well as individual teacher needs. Another significant conclusion was that Stages One to Three should be merged into a single stage - to encourage teachers to press on to the tertiary credit option. Finally, it was concluded that Gourmet PD whilst retaining its original vision, should continue to adapt and improvise to meet changing circumstances.

At the time of writing (January 1999) over 7 000 teachers are engaged in Gourmet or Gourmet-based PD activity.

PS. In the Australian spring of 1999 (September/October), the Kennett government called a state election but, to the astonishment of all except bush-dwellers, was thrown out of office. The election campaign had been seen as a foregone conclusion by the Liberal/National coalition – but the government fell foul of a cataclysmic rural backlash. A Labor government swept to power with the assistance of three rural independent candidates, two of whom were from Gippsland. By then, the Liberal/National Commonwealth Government in Canberra had appointed a Minister for Regional Affairs.

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